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## CAPS CONSUMER REPORT WINTER 1988

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

110 TREMONT STREET, BOSTON, MASS. 02108

TEL: 727-5550

800-392-6450

CHARLES CRAWFORD  
COMMISSIONER

BOB CASEY  
DIRECTOR

### WINTER GREETINGS AND FALL REMEMBRANCES by Bob Casey

All of us at CAPS wish you a wonderfully happy and healthy 1988. The winter cold is upon us, but it is so very nice to note that our next Consumer Report will be entitled spring. Though it may be cold on the outside, it is nice and warm here at MCB especially once a month when our Consumer Meeting convenes. We would love to have you join us on February 19th and March 18th from 9:30 - 11:30. If you have any questions, feel free to call me or our staff (617) 727-5550 or 1-800-392-6556 (TDD).

Looking back over the fall, some events have occurred that might be of note. One nice event was that Jean Healy, Director of the Deaf/Blind Contact Center in Wollaston, has joined us as a regular at our consumer meetings. We're very glad that Jean can be with us.

Also, in the fall the Kaileigh Mulligan Home Care for Disabled Children was established by the state to provide home and community-based medical services to certain severely disabled children. We here at MCB have already begun to implement the program. The program will enable severely



disabled children to remain at home instead of residing in an institution. Medicaid determination will be made for the child without regard to the financial circumstances of the parents. Further information may be obtained from Maria Regan of our Medical Assistance Unit.

Tax Assistance for lower income older persons is provided at this time of year by volunteers of the American Association of Retired persons in cooperation with the I.R.S. Information regarding site locations can be obtained by contacting Martha Clapp at the I.R.S. 565-1645 or Dr. Kenneth Shone at 727-1102, ext. 8197.

Congratulations are again extended to CAPS Worker Phil Phenix who so ably covers the Region V office. This fall Phil was awarded the Governor's Award for outstanding employee with a disability. We are proud and fortunate to have Phil with us here at M.C.B.

See you in the springtime and please why not attend a Consumer Meeting as part of your New Year's resolution.

## **GOLDEN ACCESS PASS**

**by Sandy Coady - Region I**

As I sit here contemplating that to contribute to this issue of the CAPS Consumer Newsletter, it is ten degree and overcast and there is close to a foot of snow outside. Ever since I gave up skiing I find little more depressing than winter in New England. What to do? For me the best medicine is thinking "summer". That conjures up visions of sitting on a warm sunny beach and listening to the wonderfully relaxing sounds of the Atlantic.





To date, the only problem with my therapeutic fantasy is those horrendous entrance fees at the Cape Cod National Seashore. Never fear however, nothing is going to ruin my fantasy. I have discovered "Golden Access Pass" issued by the National Park Service. The pass entitles disabled individuals and those accompanying them in the same vehicle to free admission to any National Parks which charge an entrance fee. In Massachusetts this includes six of the twelve national park sites. Of course, my favorite is the national seashore on the Cape. It also entitles the bearer to a 50% discount on camping fees within the Park.

To obtain the pass, at no charge, the disabled person must request it in person at one of the national parks charging a fee or at the Boston Historical Park Visitors Center located at 15 State Street in Boston. It is necessary to present some evidence of disability. Your Certificate of Blindness issued by the MCB will be accepted. Once you have obtained your pass, you may use it at any national park facility throughout the country.

The situation is different at parks operated by the State of Massachusetts. Currently, in order to get free admission, the vehicle must have handicapped plates. CAPS has been in touch with the Mass. Department of Forests and Parks in an attempt to get the regulations changed so as to include the handicapped placards now being issued by the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

If you have concerns about the regulations as they stand, you may contact the Department of Forests and Parks, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston, MA 02202 (617-727-3180).



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## **INTERAGENCY CONFERENCE ON ALCOHOLISM AND DISABILITY**

**by John Usinas - Region II**

On January 6, 1988 an interagency conference on alcoholism and disabilities was held at the Sheraton in Boxborough. The conference was sponsored by the Department of Public Health in conjunction with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The all day conference was attended by approximately two hundred persons from the various agencies and Public and Private Treatment Facilities. Three workshops were held that represented blindness, deafness and mobility impairment. Each workshop was repeated three times so that all participants could attend each. The workshop panels consisted of professionals from the State Commissions, personnel from Public Treatment facilities and disabled persons who were alcoholic or who worked with alcoholics. The aim of the conference was to make treatment personnel aware of some of the particular problems relative to the disabilities. The conference was termed a success, but only one step in the ongoing commitment of the Department of Public Health's plan to provide disability awareness to Public and Private Treatment Centers.





**TRANSPORTATION NEWS**  
**STATE WIDE ACCESS PASS PROGRAM**  
by Arthur Singer - Regions III, VI

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has developed a State Wide Access Pass Program. A provision of this program is that those individuals who are eligible for paratransit service with their transit authority can receive paratransit services in any other transit authority. Those individuals who do not reside in Boston and wish to utilize the MBTA paratransit service must also submit a registration form to the MBTA. According to the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, this form will not be used to reevaluate your application but simply to register the individual for the service. The MBTA will honor the determination of the other transit authorities. Note, the MBTA paratransit service is only available in downtown Boston and to or from Logan Airport.

**RIDE**

The Client Assistance Program and the Mobility Department are working with the Special Needs Advisory Committee Subcommittee on Visually Impaired and Hard of Hearing regarding legally blind individuals who apply for the MBTA RIDE service. The subcommittee has put forward to the MBTA's Office of Special Needs a request that any legally blind individual who applies for RIDE services be determined to be eligible for the RIDE service. At this point the subcommittee is obtaining the paratransit policy regarding legally blind individuals in the other transit authorities. CAP and the Mobility Department would like any legally blind individual who has applied for RIDE service and been denied to contact us so that we can investigate the reason for denial and also provide this information to the subcommittee.



## **SSI COST OF LIVING INCREASE**

**by Arthur Singer - Regions III, VI**

The Social Security Administration will be giving Supplemental Security Income recipients A 4.2 percent cost of living increase for 1988. This means that those individuals receiving \$489.74 per month will receive \$503.74 per month in 1988. If clients also receive Social Security pensions which are less than \$523.74 then they could be eligible for SSI-Blind, if they receive no other forms of income as determined by Social Security and have assets less than \$1,900. The reason clients could be eligible for SSI-Blind if they receive less than \$523.74 from a Social Security pension is that the Social Security Administration disregards \$20.00 from those pensions when calculating eligibility for SSI.

## **EXEMPTIONS FOR BLIND CONSUMERS**

**by Irving Sheppard III - Region IV**

Visually impaired A.T. and T. Subscribers are exempt from the cost of long distance calls placed to Directory Assistance.

To apply, simply telephone 1-800-222-0300 and request a Handicapped Exemption Form.

At this time, A.T. and T. is issuing the forms if a customer has actually been billed for such a call.

In the past, the Internal Revenue Service has granted blind taxpayers an additional individual income tax exemption. According to Publication 553, available from IRS, the additional exemption has now been replaced by additional standard deductions.

Publication 553 is available from the IRS. To order a copy of Publication 553, the IRS may be contacted at 1-800-424-1040.



## STICKERS FOR RESTAURANT OWNERS

by Phil Phenix

Region V

As of the first of January the New Bedford Lions Club has undertaken to distribute stickers to the restaurants in the New Bedford area, which declare that guide dogs are permitted on these premises.

John Hoyle, representative for the Lions Club, said recently that this program was started fifteen to twenty years ago, but that with so many changes in ownership and so many new restaurants in the area, it was time to reacquaint people with the laws regarding guide dogs. Also, this was precipitated when a client in the New Bedford/Fall River area was told by a restaurant owner that her guide dog could not accompany her into the establishment.

This reporter in speaking with John Hoyle recommended that Club members have copies of Chapter 272 which gives specific details about guide dogs and blind and handicapped people in general. So far restaurant owners have responded favorably and many of them were suprised to learn that there is even a law covering guide dogs and that this is not just a matter of individual Noblesse Oblige.





## **NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION**

**The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) does not discriminate in terms or conditions of employment or in provision of services on the basis or race, color, national origin, sex, age, handicap or veteran status.**

**Any person having inquiries or complaints concerning nondiscrimination in employment is directed to contact M. Eugene Rivers, MCB, 110 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02108 727-5550 extension 200, or toll free 1-800-392-6450/voice, 1-800-392-6556/TDD.**

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**Any person may also contact the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202, or the Director, U.S. Department Education, Office for Civil Rights, Region One, Boston, Massachusetts 02109, regarding MCB's compliance with the regulations implementing Title VI, 34 C.F.R. Part 100; Title IX, 34 C.F.R. Part 106; Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 45 C.F.R. 90; or, Section 504, 34 C.F.R. Part 104.**

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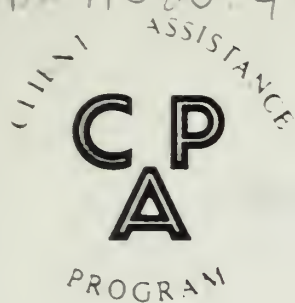
REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST  
IN WHICH ARE CONTAINED  
THE MOST IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING  
CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS REIGN

BY  
JOHN BURNET  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
THE SECOND

LONDON  
Printed by J. Streater, at the Angel in St. Dunstons Church  
in the Strand, near the Theatre Royal  
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## CAPS CONSUMER REPORT SPRING 1988

CHARLES CRAWFORD  
COMMISSIONER  
**BOB CASEY**  
DIRECTOR

By Bob Casey

Spring has finally arrived. We welcome it and wish it will start bringing us many warm comfortable months ahead. As long as we are talking about welcoming, we have welcomed some new consumers to our monthly meetings and look forward to many others joining us when schedule permits. Our next two meetings will be on May 20th and June 29th from 9:30 - 11:30 here at MCB.

Recently a consumer meeting was hosted by Sandy Coady, MCB CAPS Counselor in the Springfield Region. We had an excellent turnout and a great sharing of ideas. All agreed that we should have these meetings more often and we will. Thank you Sandy, and all of you who attended.

Congratulations to Phil Phenix, Region V CAPS Counselor, and his wife Lorraine on the birth of their child, Sara Elizabeth.

The Vision Foundation services i.e. support groups, buddy phone system, etc. are no longer extended into the Cape Cod area. The Cape office, directed by June Wenberg, has separated into its own entity. This new group is called Sight Loss Services.

Partners for Disabled Youth, Inc. is an organization that matches adults with disabilities to serve as positive role models and friends for youth with disabilities. If you would like to learn more about this group, please call Syndy Wentz, Assistant Director at 727-7440.

If any consumers have interesting data that would be beneficial to others, please let your local CAPS Counselor know and we can include it in our Consumer Report.

## REGION I

By Sandy Coady

In our last issue, it was reported how legally blind individuals can obtain free admission to National Parks Services facilities. Mention was also made of free access to state parks. To date we have not obtained any definitive information on change of regulations by the Department of Environmental Management/Division of Forests and Parks to treat handicapped placards in the same manner as HP plates. However, thanks to a Region I client, we have learned that the state does issue a "Day Use Area Permit for Handicapped Persons". The permit is free and provides free admission to state parks to the disabled individuals and the other individuals in the vehicle. To obtain a permit, send your request with a Certificate of Blindness or a Doctor's statement to:

Department of Forests and Parks  
100 Cambridge Street  
Boston, MA 02202

## CAPS LECTURES AT WORCESTER STATE

By John Usinas, Region II

I recently had the opportunity to address twenty Occupational Therapy students at Worcester State College. The students were working on a project exploring therapeutic adaptations relative to blindness. I provided a history of the development of dogs as guides for the blind, and discussed the training a dog receives at the Seeing Eye. I then put my dog "Elmo" through his obedience lessons and shared experiences I had with my guide dogs over the past fourteen years. There were many questions and much information was exchanged. I ended my visit with an explanation and demonstration of sighted guide techniques.



## CONGRESS OVERRIDES PRESIDENT REAGAN'S VETO OF CIVIL RIGHTS RESTORATION ACT 5557

By Arthur Singer, Regions III & VI

The United States Congress overrode President Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act. This legislation reverses the Supreme Court's decision in Grove City College vs. Bell.

In 1984, the Supreme Court ruled in the Grove City College case that a college which receives federal funds need only prohibit sexual discrimination in the program or activity that receives the federal monies and not to the institution as a whole. Although the "Grove City College" case was a sex discrimination case, its precedent adversely affected other civil rights laws including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

This new law restores the intent of Congress in Civil Rights legislation that would require that if any program or activity receives federal funds that the entire institution could not discriminate based on sex, age and/or handicap.

A section of the new law which will amend Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that small providers need not make significant structural alternatives to their existing facilities for the purpose of assuring program accessibility if alternative means of providing services are available.

## STATE ACCESSIBILITY LEGISLATION REGARDING HOUSING AND NURSING HOMES

By Arthur Singer, Region III & VI

Two bills, (HR 2875, S 464) an act providing a housing bill of rights for persons with disabilities and HR 5325, a bill to ensure equal access to long term care facilities participating in the medical assistance program, have been introduced by advocates as one method to assist the disabled in obtaining appropriate housing which either allows them to remain in the community or to obtain nursing home placement.

The housing bill of rights will extend the housing discrimination laws which protect women and minorities to also include the disabled. The Massachusetts Commission against discrimination (MCAD) would be given the authority to enforce this law. The other major feature of the bill is that it would require landlords who have ten or more units to provide reasonable accommodation to a person's disability. Fifty percent of the cost could be recouped by a state tax credit and approximately thirty-five percent through federal tax deduction. The landlord need not make more than ten percent of the units accessible for individuals in wheelchairs. Finally, if the accommodation would provide an undue hardship on the landlord or other tenants, then the owner need not make the accommodation unless the disabled person agrees to pay for it.

HR 5325, is a bill to ensure equal access to long term care facilities who participate in the Medical Assistance Program. Nursing Homes are to establish a chronological waiting list based on date of application. The intent of this is to change the fact that people on Medicaid usually wait longer than individuals who can afford to pay for a bed in a nursing home.

Some of the major exceptions which would give nursing homes the ability to select someone who is not next on the waiting list are:

- spouse of current resident
- former resident of the facility who has not been absent for more than six months
- requires emergency placement pursuant to a request by a protective service agency
- requires emergency placement pursuant to a determination by the Long Term Care Connection
- fails to meet level of care or gender requirement of the available bed
- requires specialized care, as defined, which the medical director determines cannot be provided to the applicant at the time of admission

Both of these bills have had their hearings before the appropriate Committee and are now in the Committee on Ways and Means in the House.

### SOCIAL SECURITY UPDATE By Irving Shepard III, Region IV

Several recent changes in the SSI program will doubtless be of interest to our consumers. Note: source: letter of January 12, 1988 from Governmental Relations Office, American Foundation for the Blind.

1. The interest which is earned on a burial account will no longer be counted as a resource if it would cause the resources of an SSI applicant to exceed eligibility limits. Remember that it is perfectly legal to place \$1,500.00 into a burial account in order to become eligible for SSI benefits.

2. A SSI blind applicant or recipient may now request that notices from the Social Security Administration regarding his/her claim be read over the telephone or sent by certified mail. In addition, the "opportunity (for special notice) shall be given at the time of application -- at the time of redetermination". (emphasis added)
3. As of April 1, 1988, a blind SSI recipient may receive SSI checks for the duration of his/her vocational rehabilitation program even if his/her vision is fully restored if the program "would help the individual be permanently removed from the SSI roles".

For more information, please feel free to contact myself or any of the other CAPS Counselors.

REGION V  
By Phil Phenix

In December of 1987 John DaCosta of Region V, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, successfully wrapped up a case before the Social Security Administration which had been ongoing for two years. The client, who is blind, disabled and in a wheelchair, successfully fought off attempts by the Social Security Administration Ophthalmologist to prove that she was not legally blind. John, when pitted against the Ophthalmologist, successfully argued that the client was blind according to 404 and 416 regulations. This goes to prove that just because the Social Security Administration has an "expert" opinion such as an Ophthalmologist, it does not necessarily follow that your case is lost.



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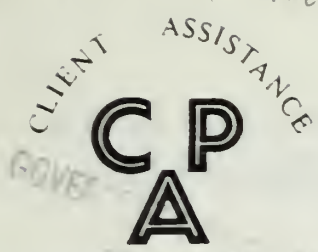
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BOB CASEY  
DIRECTOR

CAPS CONSUMER REPORT  
SUMMER 1988

by Bob Casey

We at CAPS certainly hope that all of you are enjoying our warm summer. Remember those bitter cold days of winter when we said that we would never complain about it being too hot? Well, let's not complain.

We are busy lining up a new format for our consumer meetings which will start up in the fall. We are going to try to have different speakers each month from outside as well as inside the agency. Some of you made suggestions at our last consumer meeting as to who would be of interest. We have begun to work on your suggestions. If any of you who were not able to be at the last consumer meeting have some suggestions for possible speakers, feel free to give me a call or call your CAPS Counselor.

Hopefully our "Speakers Bureau" might interest some more of you to join us once a month. Our next consumer meeting is here at MCB on Friday, September 23rd from 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m..

Sandy Coady, our Region I CAPS Counselor, left her position here at MCB on July 22nd. Sandy had been with the CAPS program for 3 1/2 years. Sandy will be pursuing a doctorate degree in education with aspirations of doing research and teaching on a college level. Sandy brought a lot of enthusiasm and dedication to this position. Clients found her to be extremely knowledgeable and helpful as evidenced by the fantastic turnout whenever she convened a consumer meeting at the MCB Springfield Office.

She will be greatly missed not only by her co-workers, but by the consumers in the Springfield area. We wish her well in her new quest.

The Ride is currently going through a transition period in which responsibility for provision of core area service is being transferred from THEM, INC. to new management. This transition was effective on July 1st. The MBTA promises services will remain intact. If you have any questions regarding this transition, you can call the MBTA's Office for Special Needs at (617) 722-5123/voice or 722-5415/TDD .

## **DISABILITY LAW CENTER SEEKS PARTICIPATION IN PRIORITY SETTING**

The Disability Law Center is a private non-profit agency which provides information, referral and training regarding legal rights and services for people with disabilities. DLC provides free legal representation on issues relating to their disability to disabled people who cannot afford a lawyer and who meet their income guidelines. Their work also includes systemic advocacy in the courts, executive agencies, and the legislature regarding disability issues which affect many people.

DLC staff work in a wide range of issue areas including special education, disability benefits, Department of Mental Retardation and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission services, discrimination and accessibility.

DLC wants input from consumers about the needs and priorities in disability legal rights/advocacy. DLC has a questionnaire that you can fill out about what you think DLC should be doing. You can call their office to receive one or you can fill it out over the phone. Three community meetings will be held where you can talk about what disability issues are most important to you.

They want to hear from you.

September 14, 7 - 9 p.m. at Southeastern Massachusetts University in Dartmouth, MA. Group 1 (Liberal Arts) Building, Room 201 (Parking Lots 3 and 4).

September 22, 7 - 9 p.m. at Bangs Community Center in Amherst, MA.

September 29, 7 - 9 p.m. probably at Suffolk University, Boston, MA. (Call for location).

All meetings will be sign interpreted and PCAs will be available. Call the DLC office well in advance if you need assistance with transportation or if you need other interpreter/translator services.

Boston 723-8455 or 1-800-872-9992/Voice or TTY

DLC is holding their 10th anniversary celebration on October 21st at 20 West Street, Boston, MA at 6 p.m.

Finally, if any of you know of people who would like to receive Focal Point/CAPS Consumer Report, give me a call and I will be glad to pass the information along to our Office of Information Services.

FAREWELL NOTE  
by Sandy Coady, Region I

By the time of this publication, I'll no longer be Region I's CAPS worker. After almost four years of working for MCB and also teaching language learning disabled children, I've decided that it's time to focus my energies in the field of education. In addition to increasing my teaching duties this fall, I'll begin working on a doctoral degree in educational psychology.



Although I am extremely enthusiastic about my future, it is with some sadness I leave MCB. My years here have been both enlightening and enjoyable. The wide variety of cases with which I've dealt has forced me to expand my knowledge of issues relevant to the visually impaired. As important as this is, it is the individuals with whom I've had contact that bring on the sadness. The many clients with whom I've worked have taught me much about the needs and issues of the blind and visually impaired. I've valued their appreciation. My co-workers have provided me with many valued friendships and happy times - not to forget, the all-important referrals. Last, but certainly not least, there are Susan Pirko and Bob Casey, the two CAPS Directors under whom I've had the pleasure of working. With their varying styles of leadership, they've provided me with the support and guidance necessary for effective service delivery while respecting my individuality and professionalism. It is to all of you that I extend a warm THANK YOU for being part of my life these past four years.

**MASSACHUSETTS 1988 CONFERENCE  
ON DISABILITY ISSUES  
by John Usinas, Region II**

This conference, entitled "Access: It's Our Right," was held at the Royal Plaza Hotel in Marlboro on June 30, 1988. The program began with a welcome to Marlboro by State Representative Robert A. Duran. The opening address was by Patricia Wright, Director, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, Inc. The following discussion forums were held in the morning: Getting the Law Enforced; The Legislative Process, a Solveable Puzzle; Independent Living is a Right; Section 504 - Fact or Fiction; State Housing for the Disabled, Where is it?



At lunch the keynote address was given by Massachusetts State Attorney General James M. Shannon. The afternoon discussion forums that followed were: Massachusetts New Health Care; Community Access, Confrontation or Cooperation; Public Transportation, We Still Can't Get There from Here; Access to Higher Education, What's Holding Up the Show; Women and Disability Issues, Concerns and Ideas. The conference was well attended and informative.

**CONGRESS INTRODUCES "THE AMERICANS  
WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1988"**  
by Arthur Singer, Regions III and VI

During the week of April 25, 1988, the United States Congress introduced legislation (HR 4498/S2345) to prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities. The bill, "The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1988," is quite comprehensive and is aimed at outlawing discrimination on the basis of handicap by state and local governments, certain employers and housing providers, the broadcasting and communications industries, and in public accommodations and transportation.

The major provisions of the bill are:

- Any employer engaged in commerce with fifteen or more employees may not discriminate, nor may housing providers covered by Federal fair housing laws.
- Antidiscrimination shall also extend to all public accommodations, transportation companies, those engaged in broadcasting and commerce and state and local governments.

- The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board will issue minimum accessibility guidelines, with other requirements to be issued by Housing & Urban Development, Energy & Commerce and Federal Communications Commission.
- Finally, discrimination is specifically defined.

Due to the broad nature of this bill, it was referred to four House Committees - Education and Labor, Judiciary, Energy & Commerce and Public Works, while in the Senate the bill was referred to Labor and Human Resources.

**GOVERNOR DUKAKIS SIGNS  
UNIVERSAL HEALTH SECURITY ACT INTO LAW  
by Arthur Singer, Regions III and VI**

Governor Michael Dukakis has signed into law the Health Security Act, making Massachusetts the first state in the nation to ensure that health care coverage is available to everyone. This law, to be phased in over four years, will encourage and later require employers to contribute financially to their employees' health insurance unless they have five or fewer employees. The Act also includes a four-year hospital financing arrangement which includes cost containment measures.

By January 1992, employers will be required to contribute the equivalent of 12% of \$14,000 in wages per employee a year to a state health insurance pool from which their employees can purchase coverage. Employers who have purchased health insurance for their workers can deduct these expenditures on a dollar for dollar basis from their required contribution to the pool.

A Department of Medical Security will be established and residents who are not covered by employees' insurance will be able to obtain affordable insurance through this new department.

A key section of the new law, which advocates for the disabled worked successfully to obtain, will allow disabled adults who wish to work but would lose Medicaid benefits to purchase these benefits. The new law also will allow disabled children of working parents who are ineligible for Medicaid to purchase these benefits. According to the Springfield Union News, the Department of Public Welfare has announced implementation of this section of the law beginning July, 1988.

As Governor Dukakis said upon signing the bill into law, "When the sick arrive at the doorstep of our health system, the first question of them will now be: where does it hurt? . . . not, how will you pay?"

HOME BASED EMPLOYMENT  
and  
BOSTON EDISON NEWS  
by Irving Shepard, III, Region IV

"Earning Power in the Home" is a newsletter for those who are interested in home based employment, edited by Patricia Galbreath. It may be obtained by writing to the Quarterly Publication, P.O. Box 368, Weatherford, TX 76086.

(Source: Together, July 1988.)

Boston Edison announces new services. Boston Edison has a special toll free telephone number for senior citizens who have questions about their electric bills. Seniors who wish to take advantage of this personalized service should contact Boston Edison at 1-800-382-6995. Special SSI Rate: Boston Edison customers who receive SSI may be eligible for a discount billing rate. Anyone wishing to request an application for this discount should call 1-800-382-6995. (Note: Persons who are currently receiving the billing discount will have "R-2" printed on their electric bill).

**REGION V RECEIVES WAIVERS**  
**by Phil Phenix, Region V**

**CAPS in Region V is on a mini-roll. Over the last two months we had applied to Social Security for two waivers of overpayment. The first was for \$2,000 and the second was for over \$1,200. Currently we are working on a waiver for a \$4,700 overpayment.**





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**CAPS CONSUMER REPORT  
FALL 1988**

**FALL GREETINGS**

**By Bob Casey**

The Hot Muggies are behind us and the crisp air of fall is here -- time to put away the casualness of summer and take out our fall and winter garb. I hope this newsletter finds you not worried, but happy.

Some changes in the CAPS Staff: Region I, the Springfield area office, is now being handled by Darlene Lawson. Darlene brings to the position a great deal of experience working with the visually impaired as well as an eagerness to be able to serve the Springfield area community. We are indeed fortunate to have Darlene with us, and she looks forward to being of assistance. Darlene will work five days a week in the Regional Office from 8:45-12:30; tel. 1-800-332-2772, (413) 781-1290/Voice and TTY.

Region VI, the Boston Region, will have a new CAPS worker before long. Arthur Singer, who formerly covered the Boston area, will now be exclusively working the Region III area which is north of Boston. Arthur's hours will be Monday through Friday, 8:45-12:30. So much for internal news. Now some community goings on.



Vision Foundation reports new groups in Fall River, Springfield, Worcester, Bedford, Woburn and Boston. For more information, you can call Vision Foundation in Watertown at 617-926-4232.

Issues Forum on Family Relationships for People with Disabilities took place on November 3rd at First Parish Unitarian Church, 13 Maple Street, Mendon, Mass. (Tel. 508-473-8681)

Finally, we had a very lively discussion at our September Consumer Meeting. A representative from TMSI, the new operator of the Ride Service, as well as representatives from the MBTA, met with our consumers for two hours and answered questions. The meeting proved to be very informative for all concerned.

Next meeting will be held on December 23rd from 9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. We are open to any suggestions you might have for future speakers. Feel free to call me or any of our CAPS counselors.

## **A HELLO**

**by Darlene Lawson, Region I**

Hello everyone. I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Darlene Lawson, the new CAPS worker for Region I.

Before moving to Massachusetts last May, I had been working as a Rehabilitation Instructor at the Minneapolis Society for the Blind in Minnesota for the past 12 years.

I am very happy to be here at MCB and look forward to the opportunity to provide assistance to those of you in Western Massachusetts.

## **CAPS SPEAKS TO STUDENTS**

**by John Usinas, Region II**

On October 13th my Seeing Eye Dog "Elmo" and I addressed 240 fourth and fifth grade students at the Burgess Elementary School in Sturbridge. Public education regarding the use of Guide Dogs is one of my favorite tasks. I have given this presentation at one other elementary school and at one state college. Regardless of their grade level, students are fascinated by the special relationship that develops between the dog and its master. After providing a history of guide dog use and a demonstration of obedience lessons, questions abound. Although the questions differ greatly from elementary to college students, the students' fascination with the subject matter is apparent. I was, however, stumped for an answer when a fourth grader asked me if my dog could climb a ladder.

## **MASSACHUSETTS HAS HOMESTEAD PROTECTION LAWS FOR ELDERS AND DISABLED**

**by Arthur Singer, Region III**

In 1987, Massachusetts became the second state to have a "Homestead Protection Law" which protects elderly and disabled homeowners. Under the law, in return for filing a declaration of homestead protection with the county Registry of Deeds and paying a one-time \$10 filing fee, an owner who is 65 or older, or due to a disability is unable to perform substantial gainful employment, is protected up to the amount of \$150,000 against seizure by execution of judgment. A judgment could result from a suit filed in a car accident, by vendors or others. This homestead protection law does not apply to federal, state, local taxes, assessments, liens, and first and second mortgages.

Senator William Golden (D-Weymouth) and elder advocates have produced a video explaining how the law works and will provide it to the Councils on Aging. The Quincy Patriot Ledger reports that Senator Golden's office and the Councils on Aging are working together to

assist the elderly and the disabled in completing the declaration form. This form must describe the property lines as contained in the deed and the real property must be utilized by the individual as his principal residence.

## **CONGRESS INTRODUCES SSI IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1988**

Representative Edward Roybal (D-California) has filed legislation (HR 4979) to improve the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. The House of Representatives' Select Committee on Aging had held hearings on the SSI program in the spring of 1988. The Committee's findings were that the SSI program reaches less than half the people it is supposed to benefit. For those who participate in the SSI program, the Committee found the program to be characterized by inadequate benefit levels, large gaps in service, insufficient outreach activities and overly rigid eligibility requirements.

As a result of these findings, Representative Roybal has introduced the SSI Improvement Act of 1988. The major sections of the bill are the following:

- Raise the federal benefit standard to the annual poverty guideline with annual increase tied to changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Raise the asset limit to \$4200 for an individual and \$6300 for a couple, with annual increases tied to the CPI.
- Exclude in-kind assistance from the definition of income in determining SSI benefits.
- Require that unemployment compensation and workers compensation now be considered as earned income instead of unearned income.
- Mandate outreach to potentially eligible children through coordination with other related programs.

The "AFB Washington Weekly Report," source for this article, reports that Representative Roybal looks forward to strong support for this bill when it is reintroduced at the outset of the next Congress.



## **SS UPDATE**

**by Irving Sheppard III, Region IV**

According to an article in "Together," retroactive SSI Benefits to which an SSI applicant or recipient becomes entitled will not be counted as resources for six months after they have been received. This exclusion is reportedly designed to allow SSI beneficiaries to make "purchases or payments on debts" that these beneficiaries were not able to make while waiting for their back payments. Source: "Together," October 1988.

## **SOUTH SHORE NEWS**

Last summer a new information service was launched in our community for older persons who need solutions to their housing problems.

South Shore Elder Services, in cooperation with AARP (the American Association of Retired Persons), formed the South Shore Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors (CHISS). The service has trained a special group of local housing information volunteers who are meeting individually with older persons to discuss their housing needs. CHISS volunteers are prepared to make home visits to elders who may be considering a change in their housing situation. They discuss housing options available on the South Shore. Their role is to provide information, not advice. Elders must make their own informed decisions based on the alternatives. All discussions are confidential, though family members are encouraged to be involved in the process. This service is free and available to any resident age 60 or older who resides on the South Shore.

## CONFERENCE IN LAKEVILLE

by Phil Phenix, Region V

In late September, Frank Quinn, Director of Region V, attended a mini-conference at Lakeville Hospital sponsored by the Department of Alcoholism. The Conference was attended by MRC and MCB along with the Cape Organization for Rights of the Disabled (CORD) and Southeastern Center for Independent Living (SCIL).

The problems encountered by blind and physically disabled persons who are suffering from alcoholism or drug-related problems were addressed at this conference. Many of the drug and alcoholism centers are inaccessible, particularly to those in wheelchairs. Of course, we all understand that blind and disabled persons may have drug or alcohol problems, just as in the standard population.

In the future, conference participants will act as an advocacy group wherever problems of inaccessibility occur.

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